

# Projected record-setting air show ends in tragedy

By JO2 Lynn Kirby

*Lighthouse staff*

POINT MUGU, Calif.—The second day of what would have been a record-setting air show came to an abrupt halt here Saturday when a Naval Weapons Test Squadron Point Mugu QF-4 Phantom performing in the air show crashed into a field bordering the base, killing both its pilot and radar intercept officer (RIO).

At the time of the crash, 25,000 spectators were present. “We were right on schedule for the 50,000 expected people. But, we closed off the base to all inbound traffic after the crash,” said Bill Hudson, Director of Naval Base Ventura County Force Protection.

Prior to this tragic accident, the air show was being executed perfectly. Friday had been the practice performance for all the aviators. The weather had been cooperating to make for a wonderful weekend of air show performances and activities. The Air Force Thunderbirds, who had been at the 2001 Point Mugu Air Show and had been unable to fly due to poor weather conditions then, had thrilled the spectators with their performance during the practice day.

In addition to the Thunderbirds, spectators were able to see performances by several acrobatic aircraft, the F-117 Nighthawk stealth fighter flyby, AT-6 Warbird flyby, Air National Guard water drops, as well as numerous acts Friday and Saturday before the crash. Several air show acts also had pyrotechnic performances Friday night. The Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) detachment was also performing in the air show, though not in the air. EOD had wired some explosives in the center of the airfield to be set off during some of the performances, simulating bomb drops and also a “wall of fire” to end Friday’s practice performances.

Security measures were tight at this year’s air show due to the terrorist attacks in September, but the public was extremely cooperative, easing the burden on base personnel.

While the weather had held out beautifully for the rest of the weekend, the air show was canceled as base personnel, family, friends and visiting spectators were clouded with grief at the loss of two fine aviators.



Navy Cmdr. Michael “Storm” Norman and Marine Corps Capt. Andrew “Mutts” Muhs prepare their QF-4 Phantom for their air show performance Saturday.



NBVC chief staff officer Capt. Robert Westberg, Jr., left, and NBVC commanding officer Capt. Jim Rainwater, far right, talk with NBVC VIP Jack Broome, center, during the air show Friday.

Sean Tucker, right, flies his 10-10-220 Challenger-II during the air show Saturday morning, imposing as many as +10 and -7.5 G-forces on his body.



Security personnel were a common sight for this year’s air show.



The Air Force F-117A Nighthawk stealth fighter aircraft taxis down the runway in preparation for takeoff.



The Air Force Thunderbirds fly by the crowd in their delta formation during their performance Friday.